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407 Hearing Testimony on Expanded Duty Dental Assisting
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Good morning. My name is Christina Harwell and I am testifying in a neutral position regarding the specific proposals but am speaking in favor of expanding the scope of practice for both assistants and hygienists.

I have been a dental assistant in a pediatric dental practice in Hastings and Grand Island for the past five and a half years. My background is that I graduated from CCC dental assisting program and have worked my way up to be the lead clinical assistant coordinator for a large group practice. This involved a series of promotions, learning new technical skills on the job, and participating in continuing education. Some of my duties include being sure that sedation patients are properly being monitored, assuring that the monitoring equipment is in good order, ordering clinical supplies, training new dental assistants, educating parents, calming anxious children, and working in tandem with both doctors and hygienists on dental procedures. It's very much a team approach based on the patient's needs.

Unfortunately, working as a dental assistant in rural Nebraska leaves few opportunities for a career ladder. As someone who manages about 15 dental assistants, I can attest to the fact that recruiting qualified people is a challenge. Retaining the good ones is even a greater challenge, as many leave their jobs to pursue fields within healthcare that offer greater opportunities for career advancement. This week I will be saying goodbye to a 10 year pediatric dental assistant who is going to become a pharmacy tech.

There are many ways dental assistants such as myself could do more to help the doctor and patients. For example, being able to place simple restorations when the cavity preparations are small, the patient has no medical history, and the child is cooperative. I recognize that this would mean additional training and certification. I also see the hygienists in my practice being able to provide more services to patients with training.

Our practice sees many children that have no other option for care. The wait time to get an appointment can be long which can result in the child's dental disease getting worse. Sadly, I've witnessed too many times, children in pain and with facial swelling who could have avoided the problem with appropriate and timely dental care. In addition, I may have to sit with a patient for long periods of time waiting for a doctor to come over. Having more simple procedures that I and my dental assisting and hygiene colleagues can do would mean that we could help more kids and have the supervision of our doctors available.

Thank you for considering these important proposals. I see them as making a big difference in patient care, improving access to care, decreasing patient wait times, and improving dental assistants' opportunities to contribute in more meaningful way to the dental team.